

# DESIGNING THE FUTURE

**T**he White House is the most powerful symbol of America's democratic ideals, a three-dimensional expression of its fundamental principles and values. It is also America's public face, the one it shows to the rest of the world.

Fifty years have passed since the leg of Margaret Truman's grand piano broke through the ceiling of the Family Dining Room, and the family was forced to move across Pennsylvania Avenue to Blair House while the "President's House" was renovated from cellar to roof. Nine presidents have occupied the White House since then, and it is still essentially a 1950s residence. Problems have continued to pile up like logs behind a dam, until the quick fixes no longer work. It is time for a different approach.

The *Comprehensive Design Plan* will make the White House more efficient, livable and economical to operate. It will provide the space and the services that are taken for granted in modern office buildings, but that are currently lacking in the headquarters of American government. The plan will protect the White House's historic setting and dramatic views, while increasing the enjoyment of the millions of people who visit it.

In addition to a ticket and a brochure, visitors will get an overview of the history and the symbolism of the house. Students will have new opportunities to learn how the executive branch relates to the rest of the American government, using the latest electronic technology. The lines will be shorter, the approaches more attractive, the introductory information more precise and immediately useful.

And everyone will get a chance to experience President's Park as it was meant to be — not a collection of fragments linked only by service roads and parking lots, but a continuous and



coherent landscape in which individual historical elements come together to form a dignified and memorable whole.

The *Comprehensive Design Plan* provides an opportunity to shape the future of the White House instead of trusting it to chance. “[History] clearly shows that we arrive at catastrophe by failing to meet situations,” said Eleanor Roosevelt, “by failing to act where we should act. . . . [The] opportunity passes and the next situation always is more difficult than the last one.”

The *Comprehensive Design Plan* represents a consensus of hundreds of planners, architects, historians and ordinary citizens about how to protect and enhance one of the preeminent symbols of our democracy. Its priorities are clear: to make the White House more livable for first families, more functional for its staff, more informative for visitors and more inspiring for the nation. Such an opportunity comes along rarely. Not to seize it would be impractical, insensitive and irresponsible. Now is the time to act.